



Focus on Stormwater Pollution Control

from Ecology's Water Quality Program

What is stormwater?

Stormwater is the water that runs off surfaces such as rooftops, paved streets, highways, and parking lots. It can also come from hard, grassy surfaces including lawns and play fields as well as graveled roads and parking lots.

Why is stormwater a problem in Washington?

Stormwater is a problem because it is often polluted and can harm human health, drinking water, and fish habitat. Untreated stormwater contains toxic metals, organic compounds, and bacterial and viral pathogens. It is not safe for people to drink and is not recommended for swimming. In some areas of Washington, gravelly soils allow rapid infiltration of storm water. Untreated stormwater discharging to the ground can contaminate aquifers used for drinking water. Virtually all of our urban creeks, streams, and rivers are harmed by urban stormwater runoff. Stormwater is the leading contributor to water quality pollution of urban waterways. Urban development causes significant changes in patterns of stormwater runoff – leading to increased flooding during the wet season and decreased stream flows during the dry season.

Programs to control pollution from stormwater

Phase I and II General Permits

In 1987, Congress changed the Clean Water Act to regulate stormwater. Under the revisions, NPDES permits are required for municipal stormwater discharges to surface waters. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed rules to implement the new stormwater requirements in two phases:

Phase I — Under Phase I, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) has issued stormwater NPDES General Permits to cover stormwater discharges from certain industries and construction sites involving five or more acres and municipalities with a population of more than 100,000.

There are approximately 1,400 facilities covered under the Industrial General Permit. The number of construction sites under the current Phase I Construction General Permit varies seasonally, from about 350 to nearly 700 sites. The cities of Seattle and Tacoma, and Clark, King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties are covered under the Phase I Municipal General Stormwater Permit. The Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is also covered within those jurisdictions, except for Clark County, until the Phase I municipal general permit is reissued. The Phase I municipal general stormwater permit is scheduled for preliminary review by January 2005 and reissuance by late summer 2005. A state-wide general stormwater permit for WSDOT is scheduled for preliminary review by January 2005 and issuance by June 2005.

Phase II — EPA issued the final Phase II stormwater regulations in December 1999. The Phase II regulations expand the requirement for stormwater permits to all municipalities located in the 2000 census-defined urbanized areas. The rule also requires an evaluation of cities outside of urbanized areas that are more than 10,000 in population to determine if a permit is necessary for some or all of these cities. A total of 102 jurisdictions have been tentatively identified by Ecology as communities needing coverage under a Phase II municipal general stormwater permit. Ecology will develop separate general permits for eastern and western Washington. The Phase II municipal general permit must include provisions for public education and outreach, public participation and involvement, illicit discharge detection and elimination, construction site runoff controls, post-construction runoff controls, pollution prevention, and good housekeeping practices. The Phase II municipal general stormwater permit for western Washington is scheduled for preliminary review by January 2005 and reissuance by late summer 2005. The Phase II municipal general stormwater permit for eastern Washington is scheduled for preliminary review by late spring 2005 and reissuance by the end of 2005.

Phase II also expands construction stormwater permitting requirements to cover sites that have between one and five acres of disturbed land. This expansion of the construction general permit is expected to increase the number of permitted sites by a factor of 2 to 3. A revised general permit (or permits) is currently under development that will address both Phase I and Phase II construction stormwater requirements. Best estimate for issuance date is summer 2005.

Stormwater Management Manual

In 2001, Ecology issued its updated *Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington* and will issue another update January 2005. The final *Stormwater Management Manual for Eastern Washington* was published October 2004. The objective of the manuals is to provide a commonly accepted set of standards and guidance for stormwater control measures. These measures are to be used by local governments, state agencies, and private businesses to control runoff from new development and redevelopment activities. It is generally expected that when these management measures are applied to new development and redevelopment activities, the stormwater runoff produced will comply with water quality standards.

For more information on stormwater, visit Ecology's Stormwater Home Page at:

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/index.html

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